



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER Welcome to Voices in the Hall, presented by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I'm Peter Cooper. My guests today are two remarkable musicians... Buddy and Julie Miller.

BUDDY MILLER We only moved here for economics. Just to maybe we could talk ourselves into a house because musicians are almost people in Nashville. In L.A., anywhere else we were living it's like no way a musician's going to end up with a house. We were broke and just seemed like we were going to be. So we moved here.

JULIE MILLER We were kind of fine with being broke.

BUDDY MILLER Yeah. We were always fine with being broke. But we got here and we found out this is a great city with so many, there's so much going on here musically,.

JULIE MILLER More and more.

BUDDY MILLER Yeah. And we just fell in with like-minded music friends.

JULIE MILLER Buddy would go to sleep at a reasonable hour, and I would stay up all night 'til the sun would come up. Once I got done with this song that night, smiled and I said, "Buddy, I've got you a song."

PETER COOPER It's Voices in the Hall with Buddy and Julie Miller.

"Breakdown on 20th Avenue South" Buddy & Julie Miller (Title Track / New West)

PETER COOPER "Breakdown on 20th Avenue South." Now, 20th Avenue South is a lovely residential street, located within walking distance — if you're up for walking — of a pretty good grocery store and Brown's Diner, where many of Nashville's finest songwriters go to hang out and talk about most anything but songwriting. Today, we're on 20th Avenue South, for the first-ever Voices in the Hall that takes place outside of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Why did we leave our lovely downtown campus? Well, because Buddy and Julie Miller have a great studio on 20th Avenue South, and they prefer to hang out at their place rather than fight traffic and fret over parking.

And Buddy and Julie are two of the most impactful musicians in our sphere. They've worked with or written songs for folks like Robert Plant, Miranda Lambert, Emmylou Harris, Solomon Burke, Patty Griffin, Lee Ann Womack, the list goes on and way on. Their own recordings, as solo artists and as a duo, are among the most satisfying, edifying, and electrifying things you'll ever hear, unless you don't hear all that well. But



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

my Grammy-winning engineer, Alan Stoker, and I hear really well, so we're thrilled to be in their presence.

Buddy and Julie Miller thank you so much for being with us on Voices in the Hall.

BUDDY MILLER Thank you for coming over.

PETER COOPER Yeah.

JULIE MILLER Thank you for having us.

PETER COOPER Having you and your tambourine just hit the floor.

JULIE MILLER Sorry I thought I'd move that out of the way.

PETER COOPER Is that just a normal accoutrement to your daily living is having a tambourine around?

JULIE MILLER Well yeah kind of.

BUDDY MILLER We have them in every room.

JULIE MILLER It's the only thing he considers I can play, but he doesn't consider I could play that either.

BUDDY MILLER No.

JULIE MILLER But when you play like him and you play everything there's a reason you consider I can't play anything.

PETER COOPER Well Buddy Miller does play a whole lot of instruments and very well.

JULIE MILLER He's a genius.

PETER COOPER Yeah I would agree with that assessment. And there's a lot of people who have probably heard him play and not even realized it when he was doing things in the service of others like Emmylou Harris or Robert Plant and Alison Krauss and the list goes on and on. And Julie Miller, your songs have been heard by people who maybe didn't realize that you wrote them, as some giants have recorded your words and your melodies. So this will be a good chance for folks to get to know the people behind this music. Julie you grew up in Texas right?

JULIE MILLER Yep.



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER How was that? Usually people from Texas are super proud of that and just go on and on about it.

JULIE MILLER Buddy expected me always like to be really proud of it. But really like I did most of my growing up years in Austin, which being from Texas was embarrassing, kind of like "last stop to Hicksville," you know. So I tried to lose my accent as early on as I could. But it is funny that you say that about people from Texas because yeah, you get over that Arkansas border line and you can tell oh we're in Texas, everything has a sign on it. "Texas, heart of this." "Biggest thing in Texas." Everything, the title of every store, everything is Texas and I just think, "Only from Texas? People from Texas, haven't they been anywhere else?"

PETER COOPER Well they say if you're in a bar in Texas and just say, "Man this place stinks," you'll get hit in the face, but if you're in a bar in Nashville and say, "Oh man this place stinks," you know some songwriter will say, "Man, I know how you feel. Let me buy you a beer." It's a different, a different thing.

Buddy, you were you were born in Ohio and raised in places that don't seem to be country music hotbeds.

BUDDY MILLER No they don't. I went to high school in New Jersey. But you know in Ohio even we had TV sets.

PETER COOPER Oh!

BUDDY MILLER When I was a little kid. And although I don't remember. I was just thinking about this recently. My first musical memory was seeing Elvis on the TV at probably three years old I'm guessing, and that made enough of an impression on me to stick with me. And actually in New Jersey where I went to high school, it was in between Philadelphia and New York and there was so much music in-between there.

You had folk clubs in Philadelphia like the Main Point where I saw the Dillards and Tim Hardin. And then you had the Fillmore East in New York. And in New Jersey the New Lost City Ramblers were there, were based out between there in Bucks County. And at the time Mike Seeger's wife Marge Seeger was kind of going around doing you know. She was kind of, helped me a lot as a guitar mentor. So it was a good place to be musically.

PETER COOPER Yeah. Julie, when did music hit you hard?

JULIE MILLER Well really I think my earliest memories are my parents both worked and I stayed with my mother's father and mother during the day before I started school.



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

And so between three, four, five, six, my grandfather played Sunday piano and he led the singing in church. And the whole family would sing gospel songs. And they would have people from the church over. My father, my mother sang duets in church everybody sang. So and on car rides they would sit in the front seat and they would sing harmony I would sing, unknowing that there was a third part, the third part. And so I fell into music at an early age.

And then when I got to be in the sixth or seventh grade I realized I don't know if that's cool or not. And so I had to wait a few more years 'til it was cool again in my viewpoint. But I got at about 16 or 17, I was driving around Austin and there was an incredible radio station called KOKE-FM. I mean they played. It was like your dream radio station. They just they played anything that was good you know. And they played Linda Ronstadt, I didn't know who she was or anything. They played a song "Desperado" that she sang. And at that point in my life, that to me was like, "Wow," you know, "What was that?" And I got to be friends with Joe Gracey the guy that worked there.

PETER COOPER He was really the voice of the Outlaw movement down there.

BUDDY MILLER He really was.

JULIE MILLER Completely. And I would like. I got to be the little teenage girl that would come and bring them cookies, and they would teach me about who was who. And one day we heard "Grievous Angel." And I called up "Hi it's Julie. Who was that?" And he said, "Oh I'm not sure who that was." I didn't ask who the guy was, only who the girl was. "Let's see, someone named, maybe it was Linda Ronstadt? Let's see. No, it was someone named Emmylou Harris. Well let's hope we hear some more from her." His hopes came true.

PETER COOPER Whatever became of her? So you were drawn to that harmony singing, I mean just you know something that you two do so distinctively together. It's a different kind of harmony. Emmylou talks about how when people sing together they create a third voice. And your third voice is just imminently intriguing. So you were you were interested in that early on. Now how in the world did you folks meet up, being from you know very different places and very different upbringings? How did you come together?

BUDDY MILLER The music scene in Austin in the '70s was just over-the-top great. It was. I moved there in '75, '76, I guess '76, and I remember the first night I got there just went to, Alvin Crow was playing in some club. There was great music everywhere. Shawn Colvin was one of the first people I heard singing with the Dixie Diesels in a western swing band. And I played with Ray Campy for a while, rockabilly cat who was great. And then there was an audition for a band that a guy named Rick Stein had and Julie was the chick singer in it.



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER And she instantly wanted you in the band. Is that right?

BUDDY MILLER You actually, yeah. You've heard this story then. Yeah I. For my audition I sang a song that I still do every night and it's still one of my favorite songs, Tom T. Hall's classic "That's How I got to Memphis." And you know she didn't want to hear country music I guess. She said, "Don't hire him," but they hired me anyway. We became friends in spite of that. And I loved her singing. We just started singing a lot.

JULIE MILLER Like my father all growing up taking me to school we'd play the straight country music station. And it was not my bag for those years ago. And I still remember pulling up in front of the house one day, opening the door to get out the back seat going, "If I have to hear one more country song I'm going to literally throw up."

So I got kind of you know, I had to get it turned back around to become my.. Buddy made it my music again really. As well as did Emmylou. And the reason when he auditioned I thought, "I don't want to be in a straight country band." I had done that. I'd been in a straight country band oh my gosh, oh! As straight country and his dive country as it gets! Bathrooms on stage...

BUDDY MILLER Not exactly on stage.

JULIE MILLER Oh yes, they were.

BUDDY MILLER Oh!

JULIE MILLER Yeah. You had to walk around the bass player to get to the bathroom.

BUDDY MILLER Oh I've played bass in a band where you actually, I had to lift up my bass every time somebody needed to pass through to go to the bathroom.

JULIE MILLER Might've been the same place.

BUDDY MILLER In a band with Jeffrey Steele in L.A. before we moved here.

PETER COOPER But your interests, Buddy, at that point were, I'm assuming beyond just straight country. I mean you talk a lot about the Grateful Dead and Robert Hunter, the great lyricist.

BUDDY MILLER Yeah, I'm not allowed to talk about the Grateful Dead when Julie's in the room. I mean it's a phenomenon I think that women do not tolerate the Grateful Dead very easily.



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER The ones that do follow them around.

BUDDY MILLER At least the ones I know. Yeah. Yeah. Except for them. Yeah exactly. No I get. There. That's. I guess I'm wrong about that. But no, I was open to everything. I'd hear Marge Seeger, were there to be a blues singer, Big Bill Broonzy or somebody'd be playing around she'd you know say, "You should go. We're going to hear this." And Miles Davis would play, it was a university town. Miles Davis was touring *Bitches Brew* and the Grateful Dead were playing small clubs. I took my father in to see the Grateful Dead at, was it the Cafe A-Go-Go? Some tiny little club that couldn't have seated more than 120 people. And there was just, it was just a great scene for music.

And the Grateful Dead we're doing country songs. And there were bands like The Flying Burrito Brothers and The Byrds who were kind of rock bands that were looking into country. And it was just, everything was mixed up and you didn't have to think about, "Oh I can't do that kind of music." And I remember where I was the first time I heard Porter and Dolly sing, just on a dirt driveway and the lights were out. It was at night. And that's kind of what turned the light on for me in a big way where I stopped paying that much attention to everything else.

PETER COOPER Julie what's the first song that you wrote that you thought, "Wow I really nailed this. I've got a great song here."

JULIE MILLER Well I used to do other people's songs and I'd never forget them. My songs I still forget them, I don't know why I just never can remember them. But the first time I really had that feeling, Buddy would go to sleep at a reasonable hour and I would sleep all night till the sun would come up, writing just this... And I wrote this song called, what's it called? Oh.

BUDDY MILLER You talking about the "Written in Chalk" song?

JULIE MILLER Yeah. "Written in Chalk." Thank you. And when I wrote it, it's probably not what people think it's about. It's about true things within my heart. But you know it's like Bruce Springsteen I heard say one time, "Really all songs are about is your childhood." And once I'd got done with this song that night, and Buddy was still asleep. And I looked at this song and I played it, and I looked at it and I went. Smiled and I said, "Buddy, I've got you a song." It was like I'd reached a new level of ability or something, in my own opinion, at that song.

"Chalk" Buddy & Julie Miller (Written in Chalk/New West)

PETER COOPER That was "Chalk," written by Julie Miller. Buddy is singing there, with harmonies by Patty Griffin. The line, "All I did was help you tell a lie" is as bracing as



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

any lyric in country music, in my opinion . . . and I sure do have my opinions. Let's get back to 20th Avenue South, and Julie Miller and Buddy Miller.

Buddy, a lot of people their first exposure to you was in Emmylou Harris' band touring with her. So that was, seemed to be a life changing occurrence, getting that gig and traveling the world with her.

BUDDY MILLER Big time. Getting that audition. It was an audition, there's probably 15 20 guitar players...

PETER COOPER This is for the Spy Boy band.

BUDDY MILLER For Spy Boy yeah. When Dan Lenoir produced *Wrecking Ball* he toured it for half a year or so. And I figured that was going to you know, he wasn't going to tour it forever, so I auditioned when they had auditions. I found out when it was. I just came in there and I thought I could draw on my past for that. I mean I knew how to play country guitar. That's what I was doing a lot. But what Dan was doing was, I could draw on. I couldn't do what he did, but I saw enough Big Brother and the Holding Company, Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service shows, to draw on that. And at the same time I would go hear, you know go to bluegrass festivals. So I kind of took it all in and could kind of pull from everything.

JULIE MILLER And just listening to him. I mean nobody does what he did.

BUDDY MILLER No I wouldn't try to do what, well I did try to do what he did. I kind of had to, to slide in at the audition but. But yeah I couldn't. You don't want to do what somebody else does.

JULIE MILLER He likes to play loud too.

PETER COOPER Yeah. Early 2000s you two began making records together. What was the decision involved in that and how did that go, as Buddy and Julie Miller the duet?

JULIE MILLER Well the main thing that happened. It sort of was like the perfect storm. I'd had fibromyalgia since the late '70s. That's a condition that, if you don't know, is just widespread pain. But it grows. As you grow older, it grows with you. And you know when I'd be singing and stuff it'd be a good distraction. I find that when I'm writing songs I don't feel it. It's real interesting you know. So when this sickness came over me, we were on the road and I was going, "Buddy I can't do this many dates in a row," and unless you're sick you just don't get it. You think you get it. You're listening. But unless you're sick with it, you have to be there. You have to have it. And that's true of any disease I think. And he just, he heard me but he didn't realize. No I'm serious. I can't.



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

And at the same time this was accumulating, my baby brother got struck and killed by lightning out in the middle of the country. It was in the same location that at 15 years old he had had this motorbike wreck where he had been DOA and they'd revived him. I knew it was God that did it, but they took claim. And he told me that after that first connection with death, he told me that he saw a hand come before him and say "No, it's not your time yet." And so he. My mother called you know from Texas. I'm here in Nashville and she's screaming, "Help, Julie, help! Jeff's been struck by lightning and it's the same place he had his accident." It was like all. It was shock upon shock upon shock.

Less than two days before that I'd had this foreboding feeling that I didn't know what it was connected to. But I couldn't write. I was supposed to be writing this record and I couldn't get through this one song. And I had, a couple of days before it happened I was talking to Buddy and I started crying on the phone. He was on the road. And I said, "I can't do this, I can't do this." And he said, "Well don't do it." And then I said. And I'd ask God, "Am I going to die?" Because I can usually tell what God, if I ask him he'll, I can hear what he says a lot of the time. And I often get feelings before family members or close friends, if they're going to pass away, I get a foreboding feeling about it. And I'll write about it before it happens. And I was crying to Buddy and I said "And Buddy if I ever died, I mean I'm not going to die. God didn't tell me I was going to die, but if I ever did would you please take care of my brother?" Because after his 15 year old accident he was crippled. He got hit on one side of the head, on the right side of the head. So his left side, the way it works, is crippled. So his hand was drawn up in and his leg was just straight out stiff. So every time he, with every step he took he looked like he was going to fall over. I mean he lived a life of humility without a choice. I mean it was even difficult walking with him sometimes. And I would just. But he had the sweetest. Sweetest redneck that ever lived. He was so tender-hearted, sweet and kind.

My mother and I were so worried. What are we going to do about Jeff? What are we going to do about his life? Just that week we'd been talking about it, "Oh it's up to us of course." Yes. Like they say you know, if you want God to laugh tell him your plans. And we found out, my mother and I who were trying to work out my brother's life for him, we found out at that time everyone coming to hug us you know and tell us, "Thank you. Jeff did this for me, Jeff did that." Apparently my brother had a mission going all his own, you know taking you know mothers' school children to school that didn't have a way to get to school, elderly people who couldn't get their medicine he'd go pick up for them. I mean he was just going around just doing good. And I read some of the mail that he had had sent to him by people. And people were going, "If it wasn't for you, you know I wouldn't know God. You've changed my life Jeff."

And so when I got to Texas that night I remembered there's a psalm that goes "God reached down from heaven to help me." Something like that. I've got to find that. And I



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

found it. Psalm 18. And it described exactly what my mother had described to me. "And Julie," she's screaming you know, "Julie it's lightning and thunder and hail and black clouds." It was hailing and my brother was in this ditch and it was exactly like Psalm 18 describes.

But then it says, "But he reached down and took hold of me." Now my brother's birthday was the next day. And he wanted a pony, but he was going to get a computer. And in Psalm 18 as I read on down it said, if anybody knows I and I'm pretty good at knowing the Bible and I don't believe there's another place in the Bible where it says, speaking of God that he mounted anything. But it said, "He mounted the cherubim and came down. Dark clouds came before him." I mean it described exactly what my mother described to me. And then I read this and I read the whole thing, and it was as if God said, "This is what happened."

Well our little nephew godsend Allister who just graduated from, with our help of course, from Harvard, he was four years old. And Buddy had told him, "Why don't you write your own songs?" which he didn't know he could do. And so he got a piece of paper and wrote down these names of songs. One of the songs, he's four, "Storm of Kisses." And it blew my mind. A four year old wrote a name of a song called "Storm of Kisses"? And I held that in my heart for 18 years.

And I knew that unless he used it himself that one day I was going to come to him and ask him if we could do a co-write on it because I knew that God had said, "Julie this is what happened. It was a storm of kisses. I just took you your brother. I wanted your brother to see. Oh you like ponies? How about this I'll mount a cherubim and come down and get you. And how about being up here for your birthday?" I mean it was. God spoke all these. I was down on my knees you know praying in the little bedroom. I mean. I mean at a time like that you truly are as close and as vulnerable and as desperate for God as you can get. And I really did perceive God to be communicating these things to me.

"Storm of Kisses" - Buddy & Julie Miller (Breakdown on 20th Ave South / New West)

PETER COOPER That was "Storm of Kisses" from the heart of Julie Miller. Now let's get back to my conversation with Buddy and Julie Miller.

JULIE MILLER We had apparently how many, a 2-record, 3-record deal? Anyway we still had a record left on our deal. And I figured well by now they think I'm dead you know I'm sure they're not looking for a record from me. And we got in a conversation, Buddy said, "Yeah there's still a record waiting for a record for you," which blew my mind. And I had finally gotten enough healing and enough strength that I was like, it was in me. I had for 10 12 years, my insides had just filled up with all this experience and



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

feeling and knowledge. And the songs just came out that way. They were better than the songs I used to write. And I just. And they took it! I was shocked. They took it! So they're kind of remarkable in themselves.

PETER COOPER Julie, it's hard for me to internalize that you could feel that your art was forgotten or disabused or neglected. You are such an influence to so many. It's also hard for me to imagine how you're able to take personal trials and make them universal. I guess it's not so personal once the world hears it.

JULIE MILLER Well you know life accumulates so many different experiences that sometimes you take a little bit from this and a little bit from that and put it together and you know you have a song that's got a few pieces from five experiences. And people think that it's all one and that you said it and you meant it. And some of them are like straightforward, but some of them are like an accumulation of experience and thought.

PETER COOPER Just a collage of pain.

JULIE MILLER Thank you very much. Yes. Thank you.

PETER COOPER And discomfort. Yeah.

JULIE MILLER Thank you. You know what that is?

PETER COOPER No.

JULIE MILLER It's a cherubim.

PETER COOPER Oh. She's talking about the cover of the new album. The cherubim, two cherubim. It's certainly a beautiful work. And you've done such beautiful work together and, I started to say individually, but as Buddy was mentioning everything you've been doing for decades has had Buddy's mark on it and vice versa.

JULIE MILLER I mean Buddy makes it. Buddy makes it.

PETER COOPER Well Dodgers' general manager Branch Rickey said that "luck is the residue of design." And it's kind of like people talk about one of my heroes Cowboy Jack Clement and sometimes they'll say, "Oh well he just kind of got lucky to be around all these incredible people." It's like well you get in the room once maybe there's luck there. Okay I happened to be there at the beginning of rock and roll. You get in the room twice. Well yeah, he happened to be there to reintegrate country music with Charley Pride. You get into the room ten different times...

BUDDY MILLER There might be something going on.



VOICES IN THE HALL: BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER Might be something going on. Yeah. Well I'm glad that there's so much going on around here for this rare Voices in the Hall excursion to the home of Buddy and Julie Miller. And thank you all so much for being on this show. You're just your constant inspirations.

JULIE MILLER Thank you so so much.

BUDDY MILLER Thanks Peter.

PETER COOPER Learn more about Buddy and Julie Miller at our website VoicesInTheHall.org and use the handle [@VoicesInTheHall](https://www.instagram.com/VoicesInTheHall) to find us and to follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Join me next time for an interview with Johnny Cash's one-time son-in-law, the great songwriter and performer, Nick Lowe. You can hear some of his stuff on a playlist I made for you. It's on the website.

Voices in the Hall is produced by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, in collaboration with Ben Manilla and Jennie Cataldo of BMP Audio. And this show is recorded by the most-excellent Alan Stoker. I'm Peter Cooper. Thank you for listening. We invite you to visit the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee.